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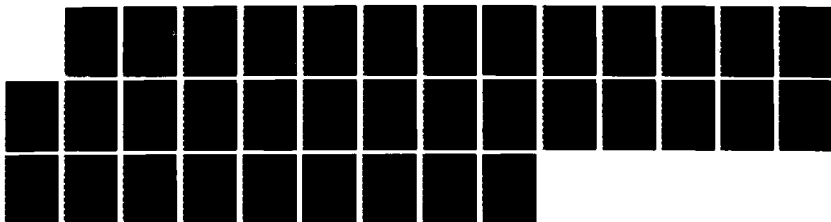
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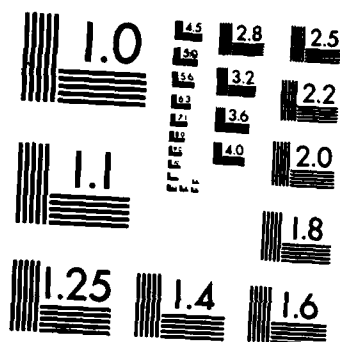
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Depth at the Operational Level of War:
Hitler's Stand Fast Policy and NATO's Forward Defense

Major James B. Gunlicks
Armor

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Introduction

The operational level of war consists of planning, executing, sequencing and sustaining campaigns and major operations to achieve theater strategic goals. The operational level links tactics and strategy using forces on the ground, in the air and on the water. The theater strategy shapes and constrains warfighting at the operational and tactical levels.

Doctrine provides the framework within which an army organizes, trains and fights. Doctrine is not theater specific unless the army is expected to fight in only one theater. Strategy may differ in various theaters and at different times. It may change throughout the course of war as the definition of victory changes. The strategy of a specific theater may restrain or constrict warfighting in a manner which prohibits the army from fighting according to its established doctrine. This may require a radical departure from doctrine or just minor alterations.

U.S. Army doctrine, as contained in the May, 1986 edition of Field Manual 100-5, Operations, highlights the importance of understanding warfighting at the operational level and stresses the four tenets of AirLand Battle doctrine: initiative, agility, synchronization and depth. Current NATO strategy prescribes fighting a forward defense in the vicinity of the Inter German

Border (IGB) with restrictions placed on operational maneuver into WARSAW Pact territory. These two conditions severely limit the use of operational depth for maneuver. At first glance there appears to be a contradiction between the forward defense element of NATO strategy and the AirLand Battle doctrine tenet of depth.

Examining the use of depth in previous campaigns can help determine whether or not this contradiction is real. Eastern Front campaigns of World War II provide a relevant historical setting for studying the relationship between strategy and operational depth, a relationship which has obvious implications for NATO's potential future war. On the Eastern Front, German, Italian, Rumanian and Hungarian forces fought a Soviet Army that evolved into a formidable opponent, ultimately mastering the conduct of war at the operational level. Because current Soviet doctrine is founded upon the experiences of World War II, the study of operations on the Eastern Front is particularly germane to understanding NATO's potential enemy.

It is not clear whether Hitler's "stand fast" strategy hurt or helped the Germans. It is possible that it had no ultimate effect either way. At first glance, Hitler's "stand fast" strategy appears to parallel NATO's forward defense strategy. Both place restrictions on the use of operational depth. They must be compared to determine how they are alike and how they differ. Inferences drawn from the comparison may help predict the effects of the forward defense strategy on the outcome of a NATO war with the WARSAW Pact.

Use of Depth on the Eastern Front

Depth includes the elements of time, resources, and space. "Through the use of depth, a commander obtains the necessary space to maneuver effectively; the necessary time to plan, arrange, and execute operations; and the necessary resources to win. Momentum in the attack and elasticity in the defense derive from depth."¹ This paper examines the three elements of depth as they applied to German and Soviet campaigns on the Eastern Front.

Each element of depth was present on a grand scale and played a major role in the final outcome. The vast land mass over which the Eastern Front campaigns and operations were conducted, the tremendous manpower and materiel resources employed by each side, and the length of time required to determine the outcome make the study of depth in this theater particularly significant.

Time, the first element of depth, was a critical element to both of the belligerents. The Soviet strategic defense gained the time needed to develop tactical and operational expertise, increase armament production, mobilize manpower, and realign their force structure. As the Soviets mastered the operational art of war, commanders required less time to plan, execute and sequence major operations and campaigns. An example of this maturation is the difference between the Soviet failure to conduct a coordinated attack at Kharkov and the highly successful counterattack at Kursk.

The German problem was just the opposite. Hitler could not afford to trade time for anything. He needed a quick victory over the Soviets so that he could devote his resources elsewhere. His strategy was to defeat the Red Army in a summer offensive, capture the raw materials of the Ukraine and the Caucasus and the Caspian oilfields to cripple the Soviet war economy² and open a route to the Middle East.³ Eventually the United States would enter the war and a cross-channel invasion would draw forces to the Western Front. Time also had an effect on the leadership of the German army. At the start, the well trained German commanders possessed a common cultural bias with respect to doctrine. This initially provided an advantage over the Soviet officer corps which had been purged of its senior leadership by Stalin. As casualties increased, however, German officer replacements did not always have the same training. At the outset, the Germans had a significant advantage in tactical agility, weapons, and force structure. This advantage also declined as the war progressed. German operations were characterized by rapid maneuver and exploitation. Commanders risked open flanks and extended lines of communications to turn superior tactical agility into operational success. The key was to defeat the Soviets before the harsh winter weather set in and before the great Soviet industrial potential was realized. The Germans could not benefit from time, which was on the side of the Soviets.

The second element of depth is resources. Both sides needed massive amounts of resources to turn operational expertise into victories. The Soviets were potentially the greatest industrial

power in Europe. Additionally, the United States lend-lease program significantly enhanced the Soviet ability to wage war. This program provided enormous amounts of materiel to the Red Army. The vast Soviet population compensated for the high personnel casualties. This manpower depth combined with vast spaces enabled the Soviet Union to avoid defeat until its industrial might could be unleashed. As resources increased, the Soviets were able to echelon their forces in depth at the operational level. Prior to 1942, they could only resource single echelons with small, partially mobile reserves. By contrast, after 1942 they habitually maintained a first echelon with a reserve, a second echelon, and a mobile group for exploitation.

The Soviet victory at Stalingrad, however, was due more to Hitler's refusal to give up an untenable situation than to Soviet materiel or operational ability. Later, after Kharkov, the Soviets had the resources and expertise to use combined arms mobile groups in deep operations. Subsequently, by Kursk, they had surpassed the Germans in production and could seize the operational initiative.

While Soviet resources increased, German resources were spread thin.

Since 1939 Hitler had been fighting the "poor man's war", trying to compensate for inferior resources of manpower and personnel by relying on surprise, relentless exercise of the initiative, and his opponents' lack of preparedness. Now his enemies were on the ascendant, and the indications were that he would be hard put to meet them on their terms. Paradoxically, Germany had been the slowest in fully

mobilizing its national resources. Dazzled by cheap successes and confident that victory was just around the corner, Hitler had for the first two and a half years of the war been content to live off the lead he had gained before 1939.⁴

The requirement to fight on two fronts and simultaneously garrison troops throughout Europe strained German manpower and materiel. Manpower resources were limited and Hitler could increase combat strength only at the expense of industrial manpower. Allied bombing of oil and armament facilities strained production rates. The catastrophic defeats at Stalingrad and Kursk exacerbated these problems. Soviet partisan activity tied troops to lines of communications and supply dumps. Because of an inadequate navy, Germany was virtually blockaded and received only limited resources from allies or neutrals. Hungarian, Rumanian and Italian losses continued to erode Axis support for Hitler throughout the conflict. Even the new Tiger tanks could not overcome the increasing numerical superiority of the Soviet Union. The German qualitative advantages in personnel, training, and materiel were insufficient to overcome the Soviet superiority in resources on the Eastern Front.

Space is the third element of depth. At the operational level, the use of space on the Eastern Front involved maneuvering to gain territory and destroy enemy forces. Operations took place along frontages of up to 800 kilometers and to depths of up to 600 kilometers. Forces were bypassed, lines of communications extended beyond the capacity of the combat service support units to sustain forces, and units were often outflanked.

German doctrine stressed maneuver, as evidenced in Poland in

1939, France in 1940, and then in the Soviet Union. Hitler's strategy did not prohibit the use of maneuver as long as it supported the offensive and gained territory.

The German blitzkrieg early in the Eastern Front campaign epitomized the offensive spirit. The rapid concentration of combined arms spearheaded by armor and close air support aircraft allowed the fast breakthrough of the Soviet defenses during early stages of operations on the Eastern Front. The Germans bypassed resistance to gain territory quickly and surround and envelop Soviet forces. The extensive rail and road network facilitated rapid movement of men and materiel within Germany. The Russian infrastructure was less developed and caused sustainment problems for the Germans after the initial BARBAROSSA successes.

By November 1941, German equipment was wearing out. Personnel losses left infantry companies at 30 percent of authorized strength. The German offensive reached its culminating point as the Red Army began its counteroffensive by attacking Army Group South and then Army Group Center. Hitler ordered the armies to stand fast. Commanders who did not obey were relieved.

His inflated belief in his own will-power, a certain aversion to accepting risk in mobile operations (the *retour offensif*, for example) when its success could not be guaranteed in advance, and his dislike of giving up anything voluntarily--such were the factors which influenced Hitler's military leadership as time went on. Obstinate defence of every foot of ground gradually became the be all and end all of that leadership. And so, after the Wehrmacht had won such extraordinary successes in the first years of war by dint of operational mobility, Hitler's reaction when the first crisis occurred in front of Moscow was to adopt Stalin's precept of hanging on doggedly to every single position. It was a policy that had brought the

Soviet leaders so close to the abyss in 1941 that they finally relinquished it when the Germans launched their 1942 offensive.³

For the first time in the war Hitler ordered a limited withdrawal in the middle of January 1942. This freed some troops for the flanks of Army Group Center. From a strategic standpoint, however, the order to "stand fast" remained in effect. Manstein points out that because the Germans held against the Soviet counteroffensive Hitler was convinced he had saved the German army. Hitler was probably correct. The only prepared defensive positions were at the forward edge of the battlefield. There were no positions in depth to delay back to and the ground was frozen too hard to prepare positions rapidly to the rear. Even though Army Group Center was almost encircled, it held on until the spring thaw made it impossible for the Soviets to continue the offensive. Hitler's first episode with the "stand fast" order, against the advice of his generals, was "a personal triumph: he had ordered his armies to stand, and they had stood."⁴ Even though his reasoning may have been to protect his image as opposed to the lack of defensive positions, this decision probably saved the army from defeat.

As the tide of the war turned, Hitler's emphasis on terrain retention hindered the German Army's ability to use the vast Russian space to advantage as the operational and tactical situation demanded. Instead of evacuating Stalingrad, Hitler sacrificed the Sixth Army when resources were critical. The psychological effects were devastating.

Hitler elevated to the level of doctrine the fanatical resistance formula he had employed during the Soviet 1941-42 winter offensive. He ordered that: the winter positions were to be held under all circumstances; there would be no evasive maneuvers or withdrawals; breakthroughs were to be localized and any intact part of the front was "absolutely" to be held; cut-off and encircled elements were to defend themselves where they stood until relieved.⁷

Manstein argued that Hitler's demand to retain every inch of terrain at any cost prevented shortening of lines to concentrate mobile forces for counteroffensives prior to the buildup of the Soviet Army.⁸ The Germans did not have time or resource depth and Hitler's order prevented the use of the hard won terrain depth. Use of depth in the defense could also have shortened the strained German lines of communication and lengthened the Soviet lines. Earlier evacuation of the Caucasus could have freed forces sooner for the winter campaigns of 1942-43. Hitler's perceived need to secure resources within the Russian heartland hindered his generals' abilities to use the vast space to their advantage.

Hitler based his belief that he must retain territory on several factors. He believed he needed to deny the Soviets the use of the Caucasus coal and oil and that he could use these resources himself. According to Manstein, the coal was of little use to the Germans because of its low grade and the Soviets were doing fine without these resources anyway.⁹ Hitler correctly believed that the forces freed by shortening lines would be offset by the equivalent Soviet forces freed by the same conditions. However, initially the Germans moved large units around the battlefield more rapidly than the Soviets and could

have concentrated forces at the critical point before the Soviets could react. Hitler also argued that shortening his lines would cause his Romanian and Italian allies to panic. Even though they were not adding greatly to his combat capability he needed them to remain on his side. Another reason Hitler gave was that a delay would have serious effects on the morale of the German troops and on the home front. Manstein argued, however, that the reverse was true. While the morale issue can not be conclusively proven either way, the other issues highlight the crux of the problem. From a strategic viewpoint Hitler was probably correct while Manstein was correct from the operational viewpoint.

Manstein's mobile defense and subsequent counteroffensive at Kharkov illustrate the advantages of orienting on the enemy force rather than terrain retention, using depth by initially giving up terrain and then massing to counterattack an overextended enemy stripped of infantry, artillery and other support. Certainly Vatutin's belief that Manstein was retreating to crossing sites on the Dnieper contributed to the Soviet defeat at Kharkov. However, the converging counterattack that defeated Popov and the late arriving Third Tank Army is an example of the use of space to gain superiority at the decisive point. These Russian defeats in the winter campaign of 1942-43, "though not decisive in character, did lead to a stabilization of the front and offer the German command a prospect of fighting the war in the east to a draw."¹⁰

While the Germans were hampered in their use of space, the Soviets used it to gain the time required to build their army

into a credible force. They generally oriented on destruction of the German force as opposed to gaining terrain objectives. Initially their counteroffensives were too ambitious. Prior to the battle of Stalingrad they did not have the resources, expertise, command and control, or force structure to destroy the enemy through operational warfare. At Kharkov, the Soviets overestimated their capability to reach the Dnieper in a sufficient concentration of combined arms formations to secure objectives in depth. Between Kharkov and Kursk Soviet operational expertise matured and the initiative shifted to the Soviets. From Kursk on, the Soviet fronts conducted successful operational level defenses and counteroffensives. Mobile groups used the vast Russian terrain to concentrate combat power. This was in sharp contrast to the earlier piecemeal efforts at Kharkov.

At Kursk the Soviets set the stage for the German defeat. Instead of initiating a summer offensive, the Soviets granted the tactical initiative to the Germans. Hitler's postponement of the German attack allowed the Soviets to strengthen their defenses and concentrate large reserves. Commencing in July 1943, the Germans attacked Soviet defenses positioned in depth. The northern axis of the attack stalled and Hitler cancelled the operation as the Soviet counterthrust began. The Soviets secured the operational initiative which ultimately led to the accomplishment of Soviet strategic objectives. The Soviet counteroffensive unhinged the Germans and facilitated deep penetration. Forward detachments found gaps in the German

defense and mobile groups exploited success using space to envelop and destroy German forces. The depth of the penetration equalled that of earlier counteroffensives that had failed when the Soviets became overextended and scattered. This time, however, the objectives were not overly ambitious. The Soviet high command provided strategic guidance and the fronts now had the resources, experience, ability, force structure, and doctrine to use this space to gain victory at the operational level. From army level down the Red Army's tactical ability was sufficient to support operational planning, execution, sequencing, and sustainment. The offensive heritage lost in Stalin's purges was finally reborn.

Depth on the Eastern Front, Conclusion

Although Hitler's hold fast strategy on the Eastern Front hindered the ability of his generals to use operational depth, one cannot conclusively prove that the outcome at the strategic level would have changed significantly for the better had they been allowed to give up territory as they wished. Had Hitler allowed a retreat at Moscow in 1941, Army Group Center would probably, as Hitler believed, have suffered the same fate as Napoleon in 1812. Stalingrad's abandonment would have postponed the loss of massive amounts of men and materiel at a crucial point in the war. Note, however, that the battle for Stalingrad tied up numerous Soviet formations that would otherwise have been free to cut off the northern wing of the German army.

Manstein's argument that shortening lines would free troops for rapid movement and subsequent counterattacks at the decisive point before the Soviets could react may have been valid earlier in the war. By Kursk, however, the Soviets were able to shift units rapidly among their fronts. Because Soviet materiel was lighter than that of the Germans, the Red Army was not as reliant on good roads and rail networks to reposition units and concentrate combat power at the decisive place and time.

As they moved west, the Soviets filled their ranks with personnel from the liberated territories. Likewise, the Germans took civilians from these territories for use in labor camps. Fast surrender of territory by the Germans would not facilitate orderly withdrawal of these civilians. Consequently, more of them would have been available for the Soviets.

Because Hitler refused to give up ground easily, his armies were not routed. Instead, they tenaciously fought to hold on for as long as possible. On numerous occasions, Hitler's generals disobeyed his orders and gave ground when it was absolutely necessary to do so. Hitler often overlooked this disobedience. We do not have the advantage of reading Hitler's account of the war on the Eastern Front. Perhaps it would indicate that he dictated the hold fast strategy to keep his generals from giving too much ground too fast in order to gain operational victories which would have come at the expense of his overall strategy. On those occasions when commanders were forced by circumstances to conduct retrograde operations Hitler may have privately acknowledged their necessity and, by keeping the responsible

commander in command, tacitly approved the decision. While this is only conjecture, Hitler's strategy probably kept the Red Army out of Germany longer than if he had given in to his generals.

Manstein's best example of the use of operational depth to set up the conditions for victory is the Kharkov operation. The Soviet intelligence failure may have been as instrumental in the German victory as Manstein's operational art. By Kursk, the Soviet lead in men and materiel was so overwhelming that it is doubtful the Germans could have stopped the Soviet onslaught even if they had a free operational hand. Of the three elements of depth, time and resources worked against the Germans. Hitler's "stand fast" policy prohibited the use of space-the only element which the Germans could control. The operational conduct of the war would undoubtedly have been different had Hitler allowed his commanders to make full use of operational depth; however, the evidence does not prove that the strategic outcome would have been more favorable for Germany.

NATO's Forward Defense Strategy

NATO is a defensive alliance with a strategy based on deterrence. The intent is to convince the Soviet Union that the costs of attacking NATO are too high to make such an undertaking worth the risk. The risks are open-ended and range from conventional war, through theater nuclear exchange to strategic nuclear war. In the conventional arena, the NATO forces must be sufficient to make the Soviets believe that their attack might not be successful. The nuclear deterrent is to make the Soviets

believe that they will be severely punished if the conflict escalates. The strategy depends upon the Politburo never predicting with confidence the NATO response to aggression.¹¹

Because the devastation that would follow a nuclear exchange is so terrible, the Soviets must be made to believe that the process leading up to the nuclear exchange will begin by a first step that NATO will be willing to initiate. This is the crux of the flexible response portion of the NATO strategy. A graduated response to Soviet aggression begins with conventional defense with a force sufficient to gain the time needed for the decision to escalate to be made. This conventional force must be large enough to make its destruction so unpalatable that the various NATO members will be willing to declare war to protect it or avenge its loss. It must also be large enough to prevent the Soviets from securing NATO territory in limited attacks strung out over time. Conversely, it must not be so large that it presents such an offensive threat to the Warsaw Pact that the Soviets are forced into a preemptive attack based on a false perception of NATO intentions or provides the Soviets with the propaganda value of making NATO look like an offensive alliance to the rest of the world. Additionally, the conventional force cannot be so large that it looks as though NATO plans to use it in lieu of nuclear weapons. The goal of this defensive alliance, then, is to maintain the status quo - retain the current borders of the NATO countries.

Within the strategy of flexible response, NATO plans to fight a forward defense. There are several reasons for this

strategy. It gives the Soviets a strong indication that NATO countries will not tolerate the loss of any territory, regardless of the forces opposing the alliance. Defending forward with a combined NATO force presents the Soviets a visible symbol of Alliance cohesion. Even if the strategy did not dictate a forward defense, there are limits to the strategic and operational depth of the NATO territory within Europe. If the NATO plan was to give up territory to gain operational depth, it is hard to imagine that West Germany would subscribe to the strategy since 30% of their population and 25% of their industry is located within 100 kilometers of the inter-German border.¹² "To abandon the forward defence of Germany would be to fuel the internal movement for West Germany to withdraw or distance itself from NATO."¹³ All of these arguments for forward defense support NATO's strategy of deterrence. This does not imply, however, that they necessarily support warfighting if deterrence fails.

What does the term forward defense mean? Lieutenant General Hans-Henning von Sandrart, the Chief of Staff of the West German Army states that it is "an operational umbrella concept of the Alliance but not a tactical doctrine of how to fight the battle at division or brigade level."¹⁴ He sees forward defense as fighting a defensive battle using the three elements of depth-resources, time and space to "achieve freedom of action, to gain time for reaction, and to absorb or break the enemy's momentum."¹⁵ He admits that previous interpretations of forward defense have suggested a static defense along the theory of the "Maginot Line" but denies that this is the correct meaning. He

concludes that "the concept of forward defence does not constitute an obstacle to the necessity for mobility in operations and to the use of the operational factor "space", but it forces military commanders to fight the decisive battle as close to the eastern borders as possible and mainly within the divisional sectors of the defensive area."¹⁶ General von Sandrart seems to have confused operational depth with tactical depth. His discussion indicates that forward defense tolerates the use of tactical depth yet prohibits the use of operational depth as related to space.

General Bernard W. Rogers, SACEUR, has also tried to counter misconceptions about forward defense. He states that forward defense "does not mean digging in our GDP (General Defense Plan) along the line of boundary markers which delineate the borders between the nations of NATO and those of the Warsaw Pact. It does mean utilizing the best defensible terrain as far forward as appropriate upon which to establish the GDP, and using covering forces in the area between the GDP and the border."¹⁷ He proposes adding depth, or actually space, to the battlefield not at the expense of NATO territory, which is "neither expendable nor negotiable," but by extending conventional fires beyond the FEBA and by interdiction of the enemy's rear area through the concept of follow on forces attack, or FOFA."¹⁸ This utilization of space across the IGB does not include significant ground maneuver. The SACEUR indicates that "we will not attack across our borders with ground forces heading deep into the enemy's rear area. We will, however, use the counterattack-the essence of a

viable defence-to restore our borders." It appears as though General Rogers prescribes tactical use of space, i.e. counterattack, as opposed to operational use of space, i.e. counteroffensive.

In summary, NATO strategy is based on deterrence. Should deterrence fail, NATO depends upon its flexible response capability to keep the Soviets guessing as to the Alliance's reaction to the aggression. NATO's response could be conventional only, in which case the Warsaw Pact forces would immediately be engaged by a cohesive alliance defending forward to preserve NATO territory. The response could, however, consist of theater nuclear weapons or strategic nuclear weapons. Because NATO reserves the right of first use of nuclear weapons, the Soviets can never be certain of the consequences of their actions. Forward defense with no reasonable hope of conventional success, however, reinforces Soviet expectations that the conventional forces may be only a tripwire and that NATO will be forced to go nuclear early in the war. Change in strategy does not come quickly to NATO, therefore it is unlikely that this strategy will change significantly in the near term.

Comparison of Strategies-Hitler and NATO

Hitler prescribed a strategy of holding on to territory. So does NATO. This does not necessarily mean that the reasons for or consequences of doing so are the same. An analysis of the two strategies may determine whether or not there are enough

parallels to draw conclusions as to the probable outcome of a NATO war with the Warsaw Pact.

As shown above, Hitler's hold fast strategy may have saved his army early in the Eastern Front. As the war progressed this strategy presumably kept the Soviets from reaching German territory sooner than they did. Hitler may have hoped this strategy would hold off defeat until his wonder weapons were produced. The hold fast strategy, however, was not a war winner in and of itself.

Hitler's initial objective of quickly defeating the Red Army in one summer offensive before it was strong enough and had the expertise to threaten Germany was sound. His assumptions, however, were unsound. These assumptions dealt with depth-time, resources and space. The destruction of the Red Army and capture of the raw materials and industrial potential of the Ukraine, Caucasus and Caspian were not accomplished quickly. The Red Army did not disintegrate. It proved to be larger and better than Hitler had assumed.

As time passed, Soviet production and U.S. lend-lease out-resourced the Germans. Additionally, the massive Soviet population provided seemingly endless manpower. The Red Army could afford the huge casualties it took in the early years. As time and resources interacted to the Soviet advantage, Hitler could only turn to a strategy of postponing defeat as opposed to hastening victory. U.S. entry into the war and the impending invasion of the continent exacerbated Hitler's dilemma. The German and Italian armies in North Africa were defeated. The

Allies could now invade Italy or the Balkans. Norway still had to be considered and the cross-channel invasion would eventually come. Because the location of the invasion was unknown to the Germans, Hitler had to defend everywhere.

The vast space of the Eastern Front contributed to making Hitler's fast victory impossible. The newly conquered territory had to be garrisoned, lines of communication protected and then extended into an area without a sophisticated infrastructure. Hitler never opposed using operational depth to gain ground. He realized that unless this massive space were conquered rapidly it would deny him victory. Once he began to suffer setbacks, he used this space to his advantage by holding on to as much ground as possible believing this would delay his defeat, possibly long enough to deploy his wonder weapons. Hitler might have delayed this defeat with operational level victories through the use of space. However, Hitler's "stand fast" policy was implemented to avoid strategic defeat as opposed to setting up conditions for the ultimate victory as defined prior to BARBAROSSA.

Before determining the implications for NATO, it is necessary to consider the differences between Hitler's "stand fast" policy and NATO's forward defense. Hitler had no objection to his commanders conquering territory. Offensive ground maneuver was encouraged at the tactical and operational levels. The spirit of AirLand Battle doctrine was lurking within the blitzkrieg of the Wehrmacht. NATO strategy, however, allows only the tactical use of shallow maneuver into Warsaw Pact territory to restore the IGB. Even this concession has been

difficult to gain. Clearly, NATO strategy prohibits ground operational maneuver into Warsaw Pact territory. While FOFA encourages air interdiction and long range fires across the IGB, a clear statement regarding the use of attack helicopters in conjunction with fixed wing aircraft at the operational level has not been made. Hitler's encouragement of offensive ground maneuver supported his strategic objective of rapidly defeating the Red Army. NATO's prohibition against operational level maneuver across the IGB supports the NATO desire to remain a defensive alliance. Whether or not it supports the strategy of deterrence and warfighting if deterrence fails will be discussed later.

Hitler's "stand fast" policy meant that territory could not be given up even when the commander on the ground felt that his position was untenable, or even if he wanted to shorten his front to concentrate forces for a counterattack or counteroffensive. As discussed above, Hitler believed this policy suited his strategic objective of keeping Germany's allies in the war and slowing down the defeat process. This fanatical retention of terrain also suited his personality. For the reasons discussed earlier, NATO does not intend to give up ground either. Although the strategies differ, the consequences may not.

The advanced technology of warfare in Central Europe makes comparisons between the Wehrmacht and NATO difficult. General Rogers has numerous sophisticated long range weapons and surveillance systems with which to conduct FOFA. The speed, accuracy and velocity of weapons systems have improved greatly.

Today's armies are truly mechanized and motorized. One can argue convincingly that these conditions make it more possible to maximize the elements of time and space today than fifty years ago. The argument assumes that, unlike the Wehrmacht, forces are allowed to use this mobility. The tradeoff, however, is that the availability of resources to sustain these armies is more of a challenge today than before. Advances in technology certainly have an impact on the use of depth at the operational level of war.

Forward Defense as a Function of NATO Strategy

The use of operational depth as envisioned in AirLand Battle doctrine facilitates destruction of the enemy force. The emphasis is on winning the war. NATO strategy, on the other hand, is based on deterrence. The intent is not to destroy the enemy force through offensive action deep into his homeland. It is to prevent war and to maintain the status quo. The strategy is reactive, not proactive. The European members of NATO support this reactive strategy. The concept of not maneuvering with ground forces to attack deep into the Warsaw Pact is consistent with NATO's deterrent strategy. The problem, however, is that it does not account for what happens if NATO has to fight.

While a massive counteroffensive into the heartland of the Warsaw Pact is not compatible with NATO policy, operational depth can be used to support NATO strategy if deterrence fails. Sequencing battles to set up conditions that would upset the

Soviet decision making process or cause them to be uncertain of their base assumptions could dissuade them from continuing an attack that has not met its objectives on schedule. Additionally, forward defense and tenacious retention of terrain leads to decisive engagement and early conflict resolution. By trading space for time, the reinforcements so vital to NATO could be introduced into the theater before the issue is decided. Giving up space in one area to concentrate combat power where it will protect the lines of communication from the United Kingdom and the United States could pay dividends in the following weeks. Effective use of time and judicious sacrifice of space to concentrate resources at the time and place of NATO's choosing deprives the Soviets the advantage of setting the conditions for battle. The Soviets undoubtedly know what to expect from NATO's forward defense. If NATO retained the option of conducting operational level counteroffensives or delays, the Soviets would be less sure of what they would encounter. This would increase their uncertainty and increase their sense of risk. NATO nuclear policy prescribes that nuclear weapons should not be used out of desperation. Using time, resources and space to secure operational level victories that make the Soviets believe our eventual use of nuclear weapons is by choice rather than desperation supports NATO strategy.

If NATO were to give up space to set the stage for a counteroffensive there is a risk that the Warsaw Pact would threaten to use nuclear weapons unless a cease fire was negotiated immediately. This would put NATO in the dilemma of

choosing between a partition of West Germany or nuclear war. This situation can be avoided by using space across the IGB to gain a foothold on Warsaw Pact territory. Consequently, NATO would be in a better position to negotiate for a return to the original boundaries. NATO's goal of restoring the border to pre-war status would be enhanced. In peacetime it would be difficult to convince West Germany to agree to this change. The West Germans must understand, however, that there is no guarantee that NATO can keep the WARSAW Pact out of West German territory should deterrence fail. If commanders were able to use operational depth the enemy would have more to lose in the exchange. This might help the deterrence strategy and increase the options available to NATO forces should deterrence fail.

The use of depth as prescribed in AirLand Battle doctrine does not require that forward defense be stricken from NATO strategy. The use of depth to support operational level victories makes forward defense strategy viable even when NATO is at war.

Hitler's aims and NATO's aims are totally different. His rationale for standing fast probably supported his strategy toward the end of the war. At the strategic level forward defense supports NATO's deterrence aims. It does not adequately support the prosecution of the war if deterrence fails. Doctrine advocating the use of operational level depth would support NATO's deterrence strategy as well as warfighting once deterrence fails. The mindset created by the U.S. Army's AirLand Battle doctrine will facilitate the use of depth within NATO's strategy.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Field Manual 100-5, Operations, p.16
- 2 Earl F. Ziemke, Stalingrad to Berlin (Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington D.C., 1984) p.3.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.p.119
- 5 Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, (Bernard & Graefe Verlag, Munich, 1982) p. 279.
- 6 Ziemke, p. 14.
- 7 Ibid. p. 22.
- 8 Manstein, p. 410.
- 9 Ibid. p. 399.
- 10 Ibid. p. 438.
- 11 The NATO strategy described in this paper was presented during several lectures and seminars conducted during the 1985-85 academic year at the School of Advanced Military Studies, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The primary contributor was Colonel Richard Hart Sinnreich, Director.
- 12 Caspar Weinberger, "Assessing Current NATO Strategy," NATO's Sixteen Nations (November-December, 1984) p. 40.
- 13 David Owen, "A New Defence Dynamic for Europe in NATO," NATO's Sixteen Nations (September-October, 1984) p. 23.
- 14 Hans-Henning von Sandrart, "Forward Defence-Mobility and the Use of Barriers," NATO's Sixteen Nations (Special Issue No. 1/85) p. 38.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Bernard W. Rogers, "Follow-on Forces Attack (FOFA): Myths and Realities," NATO Review (December, 1984) p. 5.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid. p. 7.

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